

## An Emperor's Fear

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# An Emperor's Fear

by [cipherzoo](#)

## Summary

“He is in danger,” Shanks finally stated. It was obviously correct. “It has been happening again and again for a while now. I need to help him, but...” Shanks hesitated. “I can’t.”

## Notes

I was originally working on another fic (don't worry I am still working on it) when [this post](#) by Inpolariis stumbled across my dashboard and I just KNEW that I had to write something with this in mind.

I had the idea for part of this for a while now, but I never knew how to incorporate it into a fic. But the art just made all the puzzle pieces fall into place.

Also, originally this was supposed to be just one scene posted on tumblr, then it turned into a One Shot, and now I decided to make two chapters out of it, because the time jump between the first and the second part calls for more exposition and I didn't want to pack one chapter just full of it.

I hope you enjoy this, and I am trying to keep the spoilers to a minimum. Still, if you haven't read the most recent chapter maybe refrain from reading this for a while (again, there probably won't be a lot of spoilers in the second part, but there could still be some - I have only written a rough draft of it so far, so I can't 100% tell how all the conversations will go)

At this point I would also like to say a big THANK YOU to Inpolariis for helping me fix my grammar mistakes!

Let me know what you think or come yell at me over on Tumblr ^^

# Chapter 1

Benn wouldn't say he was worried about his captain. Concerned for him, yes, but not worried. In all their years together, Shanks had hardly ever given him a reason to be worried, and recent developments were no different in that regard. Still, Benn *was* concerned. And with good reason, at least in his opinion. For a few weeks now, Shanks seemed distracted. Not in that youthful drunkard way, that used to be his staple back in the day. No, this distraction was caused by something different. Something private. And Benn was nothing if not respectful of his captain's privacy. Whatever happened in Shanks' free time was his business and his business alone, and Benn had no need to stick his nose where it didn't belong.

At least that was, in most cases. Shanks could do whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted and Benn wouldn't say a word, that was, as long as the crew wasn't put in harm's way. Now, Benn did not believe that Shanks would ever actively try to harm his own crew, but it was still something that, as unlikely as it may be, could happen by accident. And as the second in command, it was Benn's duty to make sure that things could never go that far. Which brought him back to his current predicament.

Under normal circumstances, he would have just let Shanks be. Whatever it was, that had the younger man's mind this occupied, he clearly preferred to deal with it on his own. Otherwise, he would have asked for his friend's advice days ago. But these weren't normal circumstances. The world was changing. Fate was rearing its head, and the great pirate era seemed to teeter on the edge of a giant wave that could send it to a watery grave if not navigated carefully. They were in the New World, and they needed each of the members of their crew to be at their best. That included their captain.

He knew that Shanks would not forgive either of them, if they were careless with their crew's wellbeing, just because Shanks himself was too distracted, and because Benn failed to pull him back down to earth. Which was why the older man found himself standing in front of his captain's quarters one early evening, Two glasses in one and a bottle of rum in the other hand. He knocked twice in quick succession, but didn't wait for an answer, before allowing himself entrance to his captain's, his friend's, room.

Shanks had clearly noticed his arrival, even though any other person wouldn't have been able to tell. He was standing in front of the porthole, that allowed the red light of the evening sun to sweep into the room. Benn chose not to break the silence with words. Instead, he cleared a small space on the packed table. All sorts of documents and multiple old logbooks that had long since been filled to the brim, lay in now feasible organization strewn across the aged wood. Once Benn had made sufficient room, he put the glasses down and sat on a small stool, that had once been used as a nightstand, if the residue of candle wax was any sign to go by.

Shanks still hadn't turned around. Benn almost wondered if there was something important, he was looking at. But whatever had grabbed his captain's attention, the first mate couldn't

make it out, when he leaned to the side to look past the Redhair out of the porthole. So, giving up on understanding the situation from visual clues alone, Benn proceeded to open the bottle. The cork came out with a satisfying plop, and soon the only noise in the room was the gurgling of liquid as Benn filled first one and then the other glass. Not too much each, he had a high tolerance, sure, but he wasn't planning on getting drunk tonight. Apparently, these couple of noises finally pulled Shanks from his stupor.

"Are you trying to get me to break my sober streak?" he asked, a hint of humor lacing his words. Benn shrugged, even though his captain couldn't see that with his back still turned to him.

"Those are both for me, actually. One glass just looks pathetic, so I brought two."

Shanks chuckled. A welcome noise. It almost put Benn at ease.

"Am I turning you to the bottle, old friend?" The captain asked, and all the ease flew out of the porthole when he turned around. The face of Redhair Shanks, usually a welcome sight, looked drained. His eyes lay deep in their sockets, and the skin on his cheeks was pale and taught. So, while Benn himself wasn't worried, Shanks clearly was.

Still, Benn tried his best to match the energy with a chuckle of his own.

"With the way you have been brooding recently? Sure. Shall I take a look around? See if you're hiding any baby chicks in here?"

Shanks didn't take the bait. But he did finally cross the room to take a seat on the opposite side of Benn. Who, in turn, raised one of the glasses and emptied its content down his own throat. The slight burn was familiar, and a warm feeling spread from where it settled in his stomach. It was a welcome feeling. There were two things that would never change. The cruel, merciless way of the sea and the warm burn of rum and whiskey.

Once the glass had been placed back on the table, both first mate and captain stared at each other for a little while. Neither of them was willing to continue the farce of small talk they had going before. After all, both of them were well aware of the fact, that Benn hadn't simply come to drink.

It was Shanks, who finally broke the silence.

"What do you need from me?" he asked. As if he wasn't fully aware that whatever created Benn's current concerns, was at least partially his fault. Benn took a few seconds to look at his captain, to fully take in his presence. He seemed smaller than usual. Hunched. It was an uncharacteristic sight.

Benn let out a soft sigh and turned the still filled second glass in his fingers.

"Just tell me, what's bothering you. If we are about to meet an adversary, I want to know."

After all, there were enough people dumb enough to challenge them to a fight.

Shanks' shook his head and, if Benn wasn't mistaken, he saw the younger man slump even further in his chair. A heavy sigh escaped his mouth. "It's not that." he reassured his first mate. "It is..." for a second, Benn thought Shanks was stalling, but then he saw him reach into the chest pocket of his shirt. What he pulled out of it appeared to be a burned scrap of paper. It had clearly once been bigger, if the fold lines were anything to go by, but the wear and tear of the fire, that had claimed two of its edges, had reduced it to little more than a piece of what it had once been. Shanks laid the scrap on the table and Benn could see the hastily scribbled '-B' on it.

The pieces clicked into place. "A vivre card." the first mate stated out loud. Shanks nodded. "Yes." Indeed, Shanks had just placed a vivre card in front of him and one, whose owner wasn't doing too good, by the looks of it. Benn wondered who it could belong to. B... B like... like...

He felt the color drain from his face. "Hold on, is that..." He didn't have to finish the thought. Shanks did it for him and his voice was so gravely a cold shudder ran down Benn's spine as he did so.

"Buggy's, yes."

Well shit. *Shit*. It was the worst kept secret on the Red Force that Shanks cared deeply for his old companion. In fact, he had made sure that his crew was well aware of the fact, that should they ever encounter the Buggy Pirates on any of the open seas, they would NOT attack them, under any circumstances. Even more than that. Benn had held witness to many a drunken ramble about how much Shank's missed his old friend and how proud he was that Buggy had made a name for himself. It was cute, for the most part of it. If not a little codependent, but honestly, who was Benn to judge?

So, if this was Buggy's vivre card, it meant that the other man was doing... badly. Very badly. And that in turn would explain why Shank's appeared to be this lost in his thoughts all the time. Loosing Buggy, for real this time, not just to a great distance that would lay between them for years, would mean the end of his captain. Shanks would not survive Buggy's death, or at least not the Shanks he knew. Maybe his captain would pull through, but the man who would emerge on the other side would not be the same. Benn was certain of that.

Shanks on the other hand seemed to pay little mind to his first mate's racing thoughts. His eyes were fixed on the vivre card. Benn swallowed.

"You are thinking of going to him." he announced, and Shanks looked at him for only a second. But it was enough to tell Benn all he needed to know. Shanks would do anything in his power to reverse whatever was happening to his old friend.

"He is in danger", Shanks finally stated. It was obviously correct. "It has been happening again and again for a while now. I need to help him, but..." Shanks hesitated. "I can't."

This time Benn looked confused. “Why not?” He asked. He knew that Buggy could be a very particular man, but if he needed assistance, assistance that could save his life by all things apparent, he would clearly not throw a fuss, right? Well... maybe.

Shanks looked positively miserable as he answered the other man’s question. “He would not forgive me.”

“What?”

“If I offer my help, he will not forgive me for it. I can’t ask him to take it. He needs to demand it from me. Otherwise, otherwise, he might even hate me.”

Benn suppressed the impulse of stating that Buggy had claimed to hate Shanks before and that Shanks had clearly not paid any mind to those times either, but this was neither the time nor the place for such a reminder.

“Why would he hate you for saving him?”

“Buggy has always assumed that I was better than he. He was wrong, of course. There is so much that he can do that I can’t, but he was never able to see that. He puts me on a pedestal, because that’s what the people around us did, when we were kids. If I offer him my help from where he thinks I stand, he will think I am looking down on him.”

“But you are not.”

“Of course not. I could never. But Buggy doesn’t see that.”

Benn felt bad for his captain. Clearly the younger man felt trapped. On one hand, he wanted nothing more than to help his childhood friend, save him, if need be, but on the other, he was hesitant to overstep that carefully crafted line Buggy had laid between them. Shanks feared that either way, he was going to lose him, and that made the decision all the harder.

Benn emptied the second glass before looking into his captain’s eyes once more. He couldn’t say that he cared much for the other Emperor of the sea, but he cared about Shanks and if Shanks needed to make sure Buggy was safe, then that would be the best for their crew.

“Listen, captain. I don’t pretend to understand whatever is going on between you and him, but the way I see it, you have two options. Either you ignore it and the card either keeps burning or it doesn’t. Or you put your own mind at ease and check um on him. I mean, you don’t even have to offer your help. You can just make sure you understand the gist of what is happening and go from there.”

Shanks didn’t look too convinced by that, and Benn leaned over the table to place his hand on the younger man’s shoulder.

“Do I think it’s a good idea to sail into another Emperor's territory for this? By the seas, no. But we have probably been in worse situations. And if we need to beat some asses, we will do so. We got your back, captain.”

The sun vanished across behind the horizon with a last flash of brilliant light that colored the room in a red hue and let Shank's hair burn. The captain nodded.

“Tell the men we are setting sail. We are going to Karai Bari Island.”

~tbc~

## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

Finally, the second chapter is ready to be read.

As you maybe noticed, I changed the amount of chapters from two to three. This is because this "interlude" - the journey to Karai Bari island - ended up being a bit longer than I had previously suspected. I want to be able to have the focus of Buggy's and Shank's confrontation solely on them, once I get there, and I felt like having these conversations with Alvida and Mr. Three in the same chapter could distract from that.

So I truly hope that you aren't too disappointed that there will be one more chapter you, inevitable, have to wait for.

All this being said, I can not begin to thank you enough for the support you have given me already. Thank you so much for every Kudo and comment you left, I can not tell you how happy I was to read your lovely words.

I hope you enjoy this second chapter just as much, as you did the first one.

Please mind the tags ^^

The journey to Karai Bari Island went by without any major hiccups. It left a bad taste in Benn's mouth. Things didn't go this smoothly, that was one of the many unwritten rules of the New World. And when things, against all reason, went perfectly, that usually only meant that the misfortunate crew caught in its apparent safety was going to be subjected to something *bad*. It was the metaphorical calm before the storm every sailor knew so well. Benn just couldn't tell what their storm would entail.

He had tried to talk to his captain about his worries. Maybe putting all their plans on hold just to pay a visit to a fellow emperor wasn't the best idea, even though Benn had been the one to put it in his captain's mind in the first place. But Shanks, stubborn as he was capable, had refused to listen. And, truth be told, Benn wasn't too surprised by that. Shanks' love for the other man ran deep. Deeper than Benn could understand, so he didn't try to. It was strong enough to have brought them here after all.

They were about half a day from their destination, when Yassop spotted the ship coming their way. They had expected this. After all, this was emperor territory. It would have been a lot weirder if they had made it all the way to Karai Bari Island, without running into one or multiple of Buggy's, or Cross Guild's, commanders.

The crew had the strict orders to stay as calm and nonthreatening as possible. Shanks had no plans of starting a war between two emperors. Not right now, not when all their plans were



just starting to move along. In Benn's eyes, this was merely postponing the inevitable. Sooner or later the emperors would clash, and for the time being Benn wasn't sure how aware Shanks was of the fact that he and Buggy stood on opposite sides. But Shanks was correct in one thing. If they truly wanted to get all the way to Karai Bari Island, and have Buggy willing to talk to them, they could not simply attack his people. However, if the other ship drew first blood all bets would be off the table, but that was a bridge to be crossed when reached.

The afternoon sun hid above a blanket of dark clouds, when the two ships met. Bow next to Bow, they floated on the ocean, and Benn caught sight of the woman who seemingly captained the other vessel. Despite the cloudy weather, she was wearing a big brimmed striped top hat from underneath which, her dark hair spilled in inky waves. Under different circumstances, Benn would have thought of her as pretty, but with the way her narrowed eyes scrutinized them, she reminded him more of a cruel bird of prey than of a pearl of the sea.

Next to Benn Shanks straightened his spine. He knew if he were to look at his captain, he would find one of his famous charming smiles plastered over his face. It was a ploy. It almost always was. But one that had proven useful in the past. Shanks had always known how to get his way.

"You must be Alvida," Shanks raised his voice only enough for it to travel over to the next ship. "I have heard a lot about you back in the East Blue." That wasn't quite true. Shanks had paid little mind to most pirates in the East. In fact, Alvida had only attracted Shanks' attention when her alliance with Buggy had become public.

Alvida crossed her arms, seemingly unimpressed by the fact that Shanks had recognized her. Or maybe she was a better actress than Benn would have been willing to give her credit for.

"Have you, now?" she asked, her voice tinted with only a hint of humor.

Shanks on the other side opted to laugh. It was fake, but Alvida didn't need to know that.

"Of course, I have! Though I must admit, the stories do not do you justice. You are even more beautiful in person."

*Ah*, so flattery it was. If Benn wasn't mistaken, he was sure he could see a smug smile creep unto the young woman's face. Shanks continued.

"Allow me to introduce myself. You would know me as 'Red-Haired' Shanks. This is my crew." He made a sweeping motion with his good arm, indicating to the small gaggle of men that had congregated on deck.

Alvida nodded. "Yes. I am aware of who you are." A seemingly excited murmur traveled over the other ship, and Alvida lifted her arm to bring the surrounding men to silence. "I would rather know what your business is in our territory."

"I assure you; we have no ill intentions whatsoever. I am here to pay a visit to an old friend. I am sure you understand that I would love to see him again." Shanks did a good job keeping his voice jovial. Despite how serious the matter was to him.

Alvida shook her head.

“You have no friends here, Redhair. Turn around and leave our waters. Otherwise, we will have to escort you out ourselves. And neither of us wants that.”

It was a farce. Every single person on these ships knew the Red Force would remain victorious if it came to a battle. But as commander, Alvida could not let them traverse their territory without at least issuing a threat or two. Shanks sighed softly.

“I’m afraid we cannot do that. If he is not my friend, then he is still someone I deeply care about. And I have cause to believe that he is in danger. I am sure you understand my worries. From what I have heard, you care about him as well.”

For a moment, silence fell between the two ships. On their side, Alvida turned to one of the men standing close to her. From what Benn could tell he was one of the people present at Marine Ford, the big three on top of his head, seemingly made from his own hair, didn’t leave much room to mistake him for someone else. Though Benn wasn’t sure if he had caught the man’s name.

Finally, after a hushed conversation between the two of them, Alvida lifted her voice again.

“Let’s talk about this somewhere more private,” She offered. Benn felt his mouth run dry. If worry about Buggy was in fact a strong enough enticement to grant them passage, then maybe Shanks’ old friend was in more serious trouble than previously believed.

It didn’t take long, after Shanks agreed to the offer, for large planks to be laid between the two ships, creating a sort of walkway. It allowed Alvida and the man she had been talking to, to cross over to the Red Force. Shanks had offered to come over to them himself, but the young woman had declined. She would not let him wreak havoc on her ship.

While the rest of the crew started to busy themselves with idle tasks around the deck, or at least pretend to, Benn refused to move an inch from his captain’s side.

Of course, Shanks knew how to handle himself and Benn was under no impression that either of these two people could be dangerous to him, but the subject of the matter was still *Buggy*. And when it came to Buggy, Shanks could become a little unpredictable.

“Thank you, for hearing me out,” Shanks opened the conversation as soon as Alvida and her companion had made their way over to them. The young woman was taller than Benn would have expected, while the man only stood out due to his weird hairdo.

“Don’t thank me yet,” she argued. “I can still decide to send you back to your own waters.”

Shanks nodded. “Of course.” The earlier flirtatious undertone of his voice had vanished, leaving only the calm seriousness that became the captain, whenever things were particularly dire.

“See, it is like I said. I am here to visit Buggy. I know, he probably doesn’t talk about me too well, but I care about him. Deeply. And I know that he is in a bad position right now. I want to help.” It wasn’t often Shanks decided to play with open cards.

“How do you know that he is in trouble,” the man next to Alvida interjected. She threw him a questioning glance. One, she tried to hide under the brim of her top hat, but Benn caught it, nonetheless.

The man continued. “This could mean we have a leak. If information like this appears in the public, we’ll have a problem. And if it’s not a leak, then Redhair must have a mole in our ranks.” Benn could understand the man’s worry. If there were rumors about his captain needing aid spread, he would worry just the same.

Shanks lifted his right hand in a disarming gesture.

“I am sorry, I didn’t catch your name.”

“You can call me Mr. Three.” *Huh*, fitting.

Shanks didn’t seem to be put off by the name. “Well then, Mr. Three. I can assure you that I have no spies among your men, and the information has not reached me in rumors either.”

Mr. Three furrowed his brow. “Then, how-”

“A vivre card,” Shanks was already pulling the small piece of paper from his pocket, when he interrupted the other man. “We exchanged them when we were young. As you can see, his life force is threatened.” The paper looked better, than it had the last time Benn had seen it. Apparently, it was currently working on repairing itself, but the edges were still burned and singed and there was not a question that the last time something *bad* had happened wasn’t far back.

Alvida and Mr. Three exchanged another quick glance. There was a conversation going on between the two of them. One neither Shanks nor Benn very privy to partake in. Finally, Alvida shook her head.

“He won’t accept your offer,” she said, and her eyes found Shanks’. “He didn’t let us help either. And we were right there. But... fine, if you think you can help him, we’re not opposed to it. Listen, it is not my place to tell you what has been going on, but I do agree, things could be a lot better.”

Benn could feel the relive wash over him at her words. That was one hurdle mastered. Shanks would get what he wanted. Alvida, however, wasn’t finished. She raised a finger for emphasis.

“One more thing. Tell me, Redhair, how do I know that you won’t betray us as soon as we let you through? For all we know, your apparent worry is a ploy.” Credit where credit was due, Buggy’s people weren’t incompetent.

Shanks weighed his head from one side to the other. “I understand your mistrust and can assure you; I have no reason to betray you. You have my word as an emperor.”

“A word means little in the glint of a sword.”

“Fine. Then let me offer this. Instead of escorting my ship and crew to Karai Bari Island, I will board your ship, and you will take me there instead. I am putting my trust in you since you are putting yours in me.”

It was at this point that Benn decided to abandon his role as silent observer. A soft clearing of the throat brought the attention of the three other people around to him.

“With all due respect, captain. I will not let you go alone.” Shanks looked at him, the same way Alvida and Mr. Three had looked at each other just a minute ago. And the captain seemed to understand that Benn would not budge on his opinion. Even though both men knew that Shanks could take care of himself, even if alone in enemy territory.

Shanks conceded.

“Fine then. If you allow it, my first mate and I will board your ship to be taken to your emperor. Meanwhile, my men will dock at the next Island from here and wait for our return.”

And in the end, this was the way things were handled. Benn and Shanks left their crew with instructions – dock at the next island, wait at least one day for either Benn or Shanks to contact them via transponder snail and, should no contact be established, wreak havoc – before crossing over to the other ship. After that, things happened surprisingly quickly.

While Alvida addressed the men on deck, telling them to get the ship ready to sail to their homestead, while Mr. Three escorted Shanks and Benn under deck. For a moment, Benn wanted to ask *why* they didn’t want him or his captain to see the route they took to Karai Bari Island, but he decided against it. They had their reasons, obviously, and Benn wasn’t about to make Shanks’ chances of talking to his old friend less, by being a nuisance to their escorts. Still, there was one thing Benn wanted to know.

“Aren’t you going to inform him?” Surely, they had a transponder snail on board to inform their emperor about recent developments. Mr. Three shrugged.

“We will,” he answered conversationally. “When we’re a little closer. Don’t want to give him the chance to run away.” Shanks chuckled.

“Yeah, that sounds like Buggy. He will be mad, won’t he?”

“When is he ever not mad?” It was interesting, listening to these two men, who clearly cared about Buggy, talk about him. Even though, Benn would be surprised if their care was at the same level. After all, Shanks could sometimes teeter on the edge of obsession.

Mr. Three shook his head softly, before he continued. “Yeah, he won’t be happy. He has his plans. It’s not my place to judge them, and I wouldn’t tell you what I think about them, but he

won't like that you're here to interrupt them. But, like Alvida said, we don't mind that someone is coming along to help him. So, we bring you there. You're on your own after that."

Shanks lowered his head in a gesture of thanks. "That is all I could hope to ask of you."

The other man scoffed. "That is *more* than you should be asking of us. He will view this as a betrayal, after all you-" he stopped himself. "You know what, it doesn't matter. Whatever happened between the two of you back in the day, at least try to leave the rest of the world out of it. This new era is stressful enough without your strained relationship churning the waters."

Benn wondered what exactly Buggy had told him about his and Shanks' past and especially how the clown's perception of it all differed from his own captain's memories, but Mr. Three, seemingly, wasn't about to partake in that particular conversation.

Instead, he was about to leave the two of them to themselves, when he stopped and turned around. His eyes traveled from Shanks to Benn and back to the emperor. Then he shook his head, more to himself than either of them. Benn was left wondering what he had wanted to say.

~tbc~

# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

It is finally done!

I can't believe that I have, for once, finished a multi chapter story, but I will talk about this more in the notes at the end.

First, let me say, that I hope you'll enjoy the conclusion to this fic as much as the first two chapters.

Secondly! Please notice, that I have changed the rating (to be safe) and added some tags! At first, I assumed that "Cross Guild" would be a warning enough, but I wanted to make sure that nobody has to read anything they don't want to.

That being said, please let me know your thoughts, but most of all, have fun reading!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Benn wasn't sure how long he and Shanks had spent under deck of the ship they had boarded, when they finally heard that Karai Bari Island was close. Shanks had grown more and more tense the more time had passed. Left alone, with only Benn to take his mind off things, the worry for Buggy had seemingly worsened. But Benn was sure that the state of Shanks' old friend wasn't the only thing his captain was thinking about.

He thought back to the conversation they had had when Shanks had first told him about the Vivre Card. *'If I offer my help, he will not forgive me for it.'* That's what his captain had said. And Benn couldn't blame him for the thought. Even Mr. Three and Alvida had agreed that Buggy wouldn't be too excited to see him. But what was done, was done and there was no going back now. Benn knew that, and Shanks knew it as well.

At least once all of this was over, Shank's would have assuredness. That would be better than having a captain who was constantly worrying about a man who, in turn, probably cared little about Shanks, if at all.

Benn shifted his weight, earning a sharp look from his captain. But his eyes mellowed immediately. Benn must have had pulled him from his thoughts.

"There's something you want to know," the younger man observed. Benn weighed his head back and forth.

"Just wondering what your plan may be," he finally admitted. Shanks raised an eyebrow. Benn elaborated. "Once we get there, once you see him, what will you do then?"

“It depends. If he is safe, I won’t do anything.”

“And if he is not?”

Shanks gave his first mate a look, one that could only be interpreted in one way alone.

“If he is not, I will kill everyone who dared to lay a hand on him.”

Benn didn’t let the sigh slip past his lips. He was afraid that this was Shanks’ answer. This could easily result in a war; he was surely aware of that. But as Benn had noted before on this journey, when it came to Buggy reasonability wasn’t always on the table.

“Just you and me?”, Benn asked. After all, they had agreed to leave the rest of their crew behind.

“If it must be, yes. But the others will follow when the time has come.” Others might interpret Shanks confidence as grandeur, but Benn knew that this wasn’t just talk. Shanks knew what he could do, he knew his powers and that of his enemies and, Benn in turn knew that in his captain’s eyes, it would be shameful to himself, his crew and those that fought against him, to sell himself short.

When they were finally called onto deck, the clouds above them had darkened and the wind had picked up. The storm that had been brewing before was now on the cusp of sweeping over them. And all hope of reaching a warm and dry place before the floodgates opened was lost, when the first pitter-patter of raindrops on wood sounded across the deck. Benn sighed and pulled his coat a little tighter around his shoulders. Hopefully, Buggy would have the decency to invite them inside.

Shanks on the other hand seemed to pay little mind to the worsening weather. Benn followed his eyes to the big tent that had been put up on the island, easily visible from the port. It was, for lack of a better word, a circus tent, complete with stripes, buntings, flags, and bows, but it could have just as well been a castle. Two tower-like tents framed the giant main structure on both sides, while a sheer village of smaller tents spilled across the area in front of it. Over it all enthroned the insignia of Cross Guild. Buggy’s by now infamous red nosed Skull, now framed by swords instead of cross bones.

“I got to give it to him,” Benn mumbled under his breath. “He sticks to a theme.” Shanks didn’t laugh, which under the current circumstances and with their audience might have been inappropriate anyhow, but he turned to Benn and the first mate could see an amused glint in his captain’s eyes.

Not far from them, Alvida was leaning against the railing of the ship, her hat pulled deep over her eyes in a vain attempt to escape the water that had started beating down on them. Benn could swear he heard her chuckle, but when he looked at her, her face was just as serious as a little while ago, when they had met her for the first time.

“Looks like you are being welcomed with opened arms,” she mused. Benn took a closer look. He hadn’t noticed the man before, too distracted by the castle tent and its surroundings, but there on the shore, behind a curtain of the worsening rainstorm, stood a man he had met before on multiple occasions. Dracule Mihawk, the Hawkeye, was no stranger to Benn, his captain, or the rest of the crew. A few years ago, Shanks and he could have almost been considered friends. Even though Hawkeye himself would probably protest that thought. But now, with everything that had happened and Shank’s worry about Buggy drowning almost every other thought, Benn wasn’t sure if the two men wouldn’t finally start the fight half the grand line had been holding their breath to witness.

“He doesn’t look happy to see us.” Benn couldn’t help the little observation.

“He never looks happy to see anyone.” The voice came from behind them, where Mr. Three had joined them.

“Then I won’t sour his mood further by making him wait even longer,” Shanks decided, and from then it only took a few more moments for the unlikely quartet to enter land.

Alvida and Mr. Three had positioned themselves on either side of Benn and Shanks, affectively trapping them between them. But Benn wasn’t worried about that, if push came to shove, they would need a lot more people to encircle them.

Hawkeye looked, like he always did. Disinterested. As if this entire situation was little more than an annoying fly, keeping him from enjoying the silence of his lonely castle. But then again, an annoying fly would have probably long since been sliced in half with a flick of his sword. His golden eyes narrowed in scrutiny.

“Redhair, Beckman,” he finally greeted, and Benn was almost surprised to be included in the words. Shanks lowered his head in a greeting nod.

“Mihawk, what a pleasure to see you,” he grinned, putting as much ease into his words as he was currently able to.

Hawkeye raised one delicate eyebrow. “I would say the same, but I am not pleased to see you here.” He had never been one to beat around the bush. His cold eyes turned to Alvida and then to Mr. Three.

“Are you two really such imbeciles, that you think bringing another Emperor here is a good idea.” His voice wasn’t raised, not anymore or less angry than it had been, when he had addressed Benn and Shanks, but only a fool would think themselves safe because of that.

Mr. Three, next to Benn, wrapped his arms around himself, holding his shoulders as they began to tremble pitifully. And from the corner of his eyes, he could see Alvida clasp a hand in front of her mouth, shaking just as much as her companion.

“What could we have done,” Mr. Three almost wailed, his voice rising in pitch. “We are not strong enough to defeat an Emperor’s crew on our own!”



“We managed to bring him here without most of his men,” Alvida continued before Hawkeye had a chance to answer. That it had been Shanks who had offered to accompany them without the support of his crew was conveniently left out in her retelling.

“What else could you have expected of us,” Mr. Three was now pleading. If Benn had been told this was the same, seemingly confident man he had met only a few hours earlier, he wouldn’t have believed it. If their further journey hadn’t depended on this conversation, Benn might have laughed. Of course, Buggy would be friends with these people. A liar and manipulator, surrounding himself with other liars and manipulators. It was almost poetic in a way.

The only thing Benn couldn’t tell was which version of these two was real and which was the mask they donned to survive.

Hawkeye’s expression was unreadable as he listened to their pleas. Finally, he raised a hand.

“No, you are right, we truly can’t expect you to be capable. Fine then, leave. I will talk with our guests on my own.” At the word ‘guests’ he almost sounded amused

Neither Mr. Three nor Alvida complained as they hurried away, most likely to get out of this horrible weather. Hawkeye was, as almost always, wearing his hat and the water rushed from its brim like a waterfall. Both Shanks and Benn were soaked at this point, but neither of them did mind for now.

“How have you been, old Hawk?” Shanks sounded as if the entire conversation he had just held witness to, hadn’t happened. Hawkeye shrugged.

“Fine, until the Clown asked me to deal with unwanted visitors.”

“He asked you?”

“Of course. He is the chairman, after all, and from time to time even he has the glorious idea to get rid of the vermin on this island. Even if his people keep bringing them in.”

It didn’t take any pointed looks for Benn to understand, who, exactly, was meant with the word vermin. Not that he cared. Hawkeye could think of him whatever he wanted.

“I must say,” Shanks continued, ignoring the insult, “I am a little disappointed. I was hoping to speak to him directly, not through a middleman.”

“He doesn’t want to see you,” Hawkeye countered. If the words had hit their mark, Shanks didn’t let it show.

“Doesn’t he? Or do you not want him to see me?” The voice of the younger man was almost casual, conversational in a way, but there was so much more to it. A thread hidden in the nonchalant words, a message that said that Shanks knew very well what kind of influence Hawkeye had on the other emperor.

This time Hawkeye truly did laugh, or at least Benn interpreted the noise as such.

“Oh please. I could not care less about who he does and doesn’t meet up with. In fact, he has been acting like a spoiled brat recently. Maybe I should take you to him, just to enjoy his suffering.”

“Maybe you should,” Shanks agreed, before he lifted his right hand to show that he was currently not planning on using the sword that hung at his side. “But I hope you know, that, should you choose not to, I will not let it stop me.” The words stood at such a difference to the nonthreatening gesture, any normal person might have gotten whiplash from it all, but they were not normal people. So, Shanks and Hawkeye simply existed in their weird polite standoff, while Benn had the privilege of experiencing it up close.

“Is that a threat?” Hawkeye asked, not at all surprised. Shanks weighed his head.

“If you chose to interpret it as such. Sure.”

For a few moments, the two men simply looked at each other, fiery hot meeting metallic cold. Then, as if an entire conversation had taken place, Dracule Mihawk lowered his head. Just an inch, effectively hiding his gaze behind the brim of his hat.

“Fine, if you want to be yelled at, be my guest.” And without another word, he turned around and started walking into the direction of the giant tent. Benn and Shanks exchanged a quick glance before following the other man into the storm.

To Benn’s surprise, the track went by quicker than he had imagined. From what he had seen, when first arriving at the island, most of the smaller tents had been pulled up on soft ground. Fields of grass and soil building the foundation on which they stood. He had expected them to turn into vast spaces of mud, during a storm like this, but he was mistaken. Of course, between the tents themselves there was enough dirt and grime to remind the first mate of all the stories of war camps he had heard in his lifetime – nautical warfare and warfare on land were vastly different in such regards – but for most of the way the three of them were walking on roads.

Or perhaps not roads but paths. Gravel and sand had been dumped out in various spots, starting to connect different areas of tents with others, while the biggest path of all lead to the yawning maw of the main tent. Neighborhoods, it shot through Benn’s head unbidden. These clusters of tents were neighborhoods. Karai Bari Island was a town. One in the early stages but a town, nonetheless.

And one that, as it seemed, was full of people. Benn knew that a lot of the men that had followed Buggy out if Impel Down had decided to follow him into the New World, they had worked for him when he had still only been a Warlord and stuck around when he had become an Emperor. But this, was so much more than just a bunch of ex-convicts. The people that lived here were families. The signs of it, undeniable. Washing lines that were strung between different tents, women and men alike rushing to bring items out of the storm and into the dry. Forgotten balls and children’s toys embedded in the mud between the shelters.

It shouldn't have been surprising. Buggy was hardly the first emperor to take civilians under his protection, but Benn still hadn't expected it. Not like this, at least. Sure, he was aware that there were towns and villages and even cities on the different islands that fell in Buggy's territory, but that so many people would decide to start their life anew, on an island that a while ago had no signs of civilization, that Benn hadn't expected.

They were about halfway to the tent when the tell-tale singing of a transponder snail cut through the noise of the storm. Hawkeye stopped and pulled the small creature from his pocket. A big red nose and bright lipstick left no confusion as to who the person calling him was.

Hawkeye 'tsk'd', before picking up.

"What do you want?" he asked. From his voice, one wouldn't have guessed that he was talking to his alleged superior.

"What do I ... Have you dealt with the situation?" Shanks' head turned to the snail in an instant, eyes narrowed as if it or the voice that came from it could somehow give him any clue about Buggy's current wellbeing. Benn couldn't see Hawkeye's face, but he was sure the swordsman was rolling his eyes.

"Yes." A pause. "I am bringing them to your rooms."

There was a short, sweet moment, during which the world was peaceful. The only sound being the rain beating down on them in its unchanging rhythm. Then a screech echoed through the evening air, so high-pitched and so loud that Benn couldn't decide whether it had come from the transponder snail or the giant tent itself.

"WHAT? HOLD ON NOW, HAWKEYE! THAT WASN'T WHAT WE AGREED ON!"

Hawkeye had had the foresight to hold the snail a bit further from his face than before, but his eardrums must have still been ringing. Honestly, it was a wonder the snail hadn't fallen from his hand with its sudden outburst.

"I never agreed on anything." The swordsman replied calmly. He had probably expected his emperor to react like this.

Buggy's voice came through the transponder snail, less shrill this time, seemingly content to plead instead of scream.

"Hawkeye, Mihawk, Buddy! Please, come on now! Can't you just get rid of them." If the words hurt Shanks, he didn't show it outwardly. Hawkeye stayed resilient.

"We are on our way."

"AT LEAST STALL THEM THEN! I AM NOT READY!"

"No," and without waiting for any more responses, Hawkeye hung up.

Their journey continued and soon after the short interlude, they had finally reached the entrance to the main tent. It loomed over Benn's head; far taller than any tent he had seen before. A bunch of people had congregated in the opening, seemingly seeking shelter from the storm. Now they stove apart like fish, making room for a passing shark. Mihawk didn't seem to pay them any attention as they did. Benn, however, could hear them. They were whispering to each other, about the swordsman himself, but even more so about the red-haired pirate that had come to pay their leader a visit. These people were following Buggy, but Shanks was no stranger to them either and many of them quickly lowered the eyes, when they caught the emperor looking at them. Too big was the fear they could accidentally pull his anger on them.

Hawkeye led them further into the tent and while the pattering of rain and the quiet whispering of people turned into background noise, Benn wondered, not for the first time, what state they would encounter Buggy in.

Why had he wanted Hawkeye to stall them? And what had he meant, when he had insisted, when he had said that he 'wasn't ready'? Well, Benn was about to find out.

Hawkeye motioned to a heavy curtain that separated a part of the tent from the long hallway through which they had just moved. He stopped in front of it and pulled one side of the curtain back to allow his two companions entrance.

*'After you,'* said the gesture.

*'Trip and fall,'* said his eyes.

The first thing Benn noticed, when he followed Shanks past the curtain, was the decor. The really, really bad decor. Colors of all kinds and shapes of all sizes were, seemingly randomly, thrown into a wild mix that made Benn question if the rain on this island was laced with psychedelic drugs.

Carpets of different sizes and materials were lining the floor, on top of which three pink and white striped canapés stood, proudly arranged in the shape of an U. The biggest bed Benn had ever seen stood at the head of the room; half-transparent curtains connected to each of the four posters. The number of pillows in all different colors and sizes on top of it, made Benn wonder how, despite the size of the bed, even a single person could find enough room to sleep in it. At one side of the room, a low fire crackled in a fireplace, the hide of an animal of some sort presented proudly in front of it. Opposite of it a giant double-sided door with golden knobs, that, from what Benn could tell, seemed to be engraved, had been placed in the wall. A big sign above it read: "Ring-Balcony". Benn was almost glad for that sign, because despite other matters being more important, it would have bugged him, not knowing where this weird door, in the middle of a tent, lead.

But that made things only marginally better. Because Benn was still absolutely floored. How exactly did a place like this, one that reeked of pure decadence, exist in a tent? Sure, it was a big tent, but a tent, nonetheless. Or was this one of these circus tricks, where the inside of any given space was in reality much larger than it appeared to the outside. A small part of him almost longed to walk around this weird place and feed into his curiosity by exploring the

different nooks and crannies, but that would have to wait till another time, if he ever got the chance to do so.

Because there, leaning against one of the sofas, hips cocked to the side and arms crossed of his chest, stood the man they had come here for. A scowl was edged onto his features, and, to Benn's surprise, he was dressed in rather regular clothes. A loose pair of dark pants, a striped shirt, and a dark crimson scarf slung across his neck. Quite tame, considering that the last time Benn had seen him, he had worn a crossed out marine uniform. Buggy's hair was thrown back into what had probably once been a bun but had since come loose in multiple places and turned into something that could only be described as a mess.

Apparently, when he had yelled at Hawkeye on the snail and said that he wasn't ready, he had meant it. But other than the messy hair and the scowl, he looked fine. Sure, his makeup was smudged, Benn was surprised that the man apparently insisted on wearing makeup in his own quarters anyway, but that was it. He by no means appeared like a man whose Vivre Card had just a few days ago almost burned to a crisp. At least not from across the room.

"Buggy," Shanks breathed out. He had stopped dead in his tracks upon spotting his old friend, and Benn could see the gentle smile that appeared on his lips. Behind them, Hawkeye entered the room, grumbling something Benn couldn't understand as he pushed past the two men.

Buggy took a few steps away from the canapés in their direction.

"What do you think you're doing, Shanks!" He asked, poking an accusatory finger in their direction.

"I didn't ask you to come here! And I didn't invite you."

Shanks took a few steps closer as well. Benn followed.

"No," he agreed. "You did not."

It surprised Benn to realize that Shanks didn't sound relieved. At least not fully. There was something about the situation that his captain had noticed and Benn hadn't. Only, what was it?

"No! And still, you are here! Getting mud on my carpet!"

Behind Buggy, Hawkeye gave an amused snort, which had the blue haired Emperor wheel around to face him.

"AND YOU!", he screeched, sending his detached hand to point directly in the swordsman's face. Hawkeye, as Benn now noticed, had taken a seat on one of the garish canapés. "I am still mad at you! I told you to not bring them here! And do you have ANY idea how hard it is to get water stains out of that fabric? GET UP!"

In Lew of an answer, Hawkeye lifted his mud-covered shoes and placed them square on the coffee table in front of him. He lifted one hand to push Buggy's away from his face, before

he pulled his hat a little deeper over his head and closed his eyes.

Only an idiot would assume that he was no longer paying attention, though.

Benn took advantage of the moment to take another look around the room. Maybe he could find the reason why Shanks was still on edge, even though Buggy was seemingly fine.

He had to admit, that Buggy's quarters were, despite their assault on one's eyes, surprisingly tidy. Even the big red blanket or coat or whatever it was that Buggy wore in public these days, was neatly hung up on one of the walls. Shoes and gloves carefully positioned on a small shelf beneath it.

The only piece of furniture that stood out was the large vanity table. It stood in one corner of the room, closest to the bed. Various ointments, colors, and powders were strewn across it. An open lipstick rested uncomfortable close to the edge. It was so out of place, in the otherwise tidy room, Benn had no choice but to believe that it had been used only moments before.

Which answered his other question. Seemingly Buggy hadn't felt the need to wear the makeup in the evening, alone in his quarters, he had dawned it for them. Or, maybe, because of them. He looked back at the Clown, and now he could see what Shanks had seen the moment he had set foot into the room.

The powders did a good job of hiding the discoloration, Buggy was probably spouting in his face. But it did not hide the way one of his eyes was still slightly swollen, or the way his skin seemed a little too tight around the left side of his jaw. It couldn't hide the bruise on his right arm, that got exposed when his shirt shifted up a little bit, or the handprint on his neck that came into view from under the scarf, when he defiantly lifted his chin to appear taller than he actually was.

Vivre Cards weren't wrong.

*Shit.*

Buggy was in the middle of a rant, even though nobody had said anything since he had yelled at Hawkeye. He had somehow managed to talk himself into a rage, but Shanks next to him didn't seem to mind. Since Buggy's scarf had given sight to what lay beneath, anger was radiating off Shanks in waves. They filled the room, and even Benn who was more than used to and usually exempt from his captain's Haki, had a hard time keeping a clear mind at the overwhelming feeling.

In less than a blink, Shanks had crossed the space between himself and Buggy, who stopped dead in his tracks, seeing the taller man suddenly this close. Shanks placed his hand on the side of Buggy's face and used his thumb to wipe away some of the powder from under his eye. For a second, both men just stood there, staring at each other, neither willing to break the tension. Then, his voice low, dangerous, Shanks asked the question.

“Did they do this?”

A pause, a breath.

“It doesn’t matter.” From his position, Benn had a hard time seeing Shanks’ face, but he could imagine the sadness that was probably portrayed in his eyes. The anger, the pain.

“It matters to me,” he finally said. “Did they do this.” There was no need for him to elaborate on whom ‘they’ were. One of them was sitting on the canapé, not far from Buggy after all.

The Clown swallowed while staring into Shanks’ eyes. All grandeur had seemingly vanished from his body. He nodded softly.

“Mostly Crocodile,” he finally admitted.

Shanks’ hold on Buggy tightened a little bit, and Benn could tell that he had a hard time keeping himself from pulling Buggy against his chest.

Behind them, Benn could see Hawkeye crack one of his eyes open. Whatever was about to happen, he was ready to fight.

Shanks, however, still only had eyes for his friend.

“Okay,” he said. “Then I’ll kill them.” And just like that, the spell was broken.

“No, you won’t!” Buggy used both of his hands to shove Shanks away from himself, while at the same time taking a step back himself, to further the distance between them.

“Buggy, they are hurting you.” Shanks insisted, a hinge of desperation present in his voice.

“I don’t care.”

“I do!”

Buggy threw his hands in the air, his own voice growing louder, but not taking the shrill tone it did when he was making a fuss. “Oh, so it’s the same as always! It’s always about what you want, what you care about! You are so full of yourself, you don’t even realize how selfish you are.”

“Selfish? Buggy, I am trying to save you!” Part of Benn wondered if he should be interfering, if he should try to mediate this conversation that was rapidly turning to the worst. But he knew that his input was not wanted here, so he could do little else than stand there and let the two of them hash it out among themselves. At least he could keep an eye on Hawkeye, in case the swordsman decided to intervene himself. But for now, Hawkeye was still relaxing on the canapé, lazily monitoring the verbal fight, as if his life hadn’t just been threatened by an emperor of the sea.

“I DON’T NEED SAVING!” Buggy was yelling again. “And even if I did, I surely wouldn’t want it to be you. I am not some damsel in distress. In case you didn’t get the news, this works for me. I am an Emperor! I have made it! SO, WHAT, if I take a few beatings from Crocodile for it? These men out there? They are chanting my name. They are looking towards me. Not Crocodile, not Hawkeye. ME. I may not have Crocodile’s wealth, or

Hawkeye's power, but out there are hundreds of people that would lay the world at my feet if I asked them too."

"The people you call friends stand by and watch when you get beaten! Is that what you call loyalty?" It was Shanks' turn to sound exasperated. But Buggy had no plan of backing down.

"And what exactly would you have wanted them to do? Fight two of the most powerful people on the Grand Line? Are you serious? It may come as a shock to you, but I don't pick my friends by how willing they are to die for me."

"They are not strong enough to protect you, but I am! Come with me! Take my hand, and I'll help you." Shanks truly sounded desperate now. Benn could understand why, this conversation was going exactly the way his captain had feared. He should have never convinced him to check up on him.

"I don't want your help! I don't want your protection!" One of Buggy's hands separated from the rest of his body to grip at Shanks' collar, shaking him as best he could. "Get it into your skull! I don't want you! And I am not going to run away anymore. I will not abandon the people who believe in me!"

I don't want you.

*I don't want you.*

The words hit their mark and the atmosphere in the room lost every semblance of warmth. Even the crackling fire couldn't do anything about it, Benn half expected it to freeze over.

Shanks lowered his head, his eyes cast in shadow, as his own hand came up to grip Buggy's. A wince crossed the clown's face at the iron hold Shanks displayed.

His voice was quiet, cold like the air that surrounded him.

"I could just take you."

Buggy's eyes went wide. "What?", he breathed out in shock. Shanks' hold on his hand tightened.

Shanks was not about to take no for an answer, if he had to force Buggy into safety he would do so, and if Buggy refused to come on his own, Shanks would make him. Benn was about to say something, to bring his captain back into reality, when a movement caught his eyes.

And then everything went by very quickly. In an instant, Hawkeye had gotten to his feet, made his way between the two men, pushed Buggy behind himself and pointed the tip of his sword at Shanks. In the same moment, Benn had pulled his gun, aiming at the swordsman head.

"I think," Hawkeye said, his voice calm as always. "It is time for the two of you to leave."

Shanks didn't even look at him. His eyes were still trained on his old friend, turned seemingly enemy. His hand still clasped in his grasp. He sighed, finally, after a moment that



was far too long for Benn's taste, and released the hand.

It immediately returned to its original place on Buggy's wrist, and the man quickly cradled it against his chest. His eyes were still big, shocked ... scared.

"Captain?", Benn, for the first time since entering this room, raised his voice. He didn't like not knowing what Shanks next step may be. Shanks closed his eyes. He took a deep breath and when he opened them again, a sadness so deep swam in them, it almost broke Benn's heart.

"I can't lose you again." He finally forced out, the mask of the competent man slipping for but a moment, revealing the boy who had lost his crew, his captain, his arm and now his friend.

Buggy was still cradling his hand to his chest, and he didn't look into Shank's eyes, when he answered.

"I haven't been yours, to lose, in a long time."

Hawkeye escorted them back to the shore. The rain had stopped, while they had been inside, but the weather hadn't fully calmed down yet. The wind was still strong enough to whip their coats back and forth, and purple lightnings flashes across the dark sky. Night had fallen.

Hawkeye presented them with a small boat, they had been promised passage back to their ship after all, and the Cross Guild was not about to break their word like this. Even though the word boat was putting it kindly, it was hardly more than a dinghy, equipped with a single small sail, that had seen better days.

Still, it would do to bring them back to their crew. It simply had to make do.

A single lantern had been attached where a figurehead would be on a regular ship, and as Benn watched the light reflect in the restless water, he asked the question that had been on his mind ever since he had spotted the bruises on Buggy's skin.

"So? Will you kill them all?" Shanks didn't look at him. His eyes were still fixed on the island that vanished in the darkness behind them.

"No," he sighed. "We stick to other plan." Finally, he turned around, giving Ben a look of sheer conviction.

"We'll get the One Piece, and then I'll get him back."

~ *fin* ~

Wow!

Where do I begin?

I am blown away by the response to this fanfiction and if I could, I would tell each and every single person who commented, subscribed, left kudos or bookmarked this, how much their interaction means to me. I was truly not expecting this, and I am so glad I was able to entertain a few of you for a little while.

An Emperor's Fear was never meant to be a multi chapter fic. Tbh, it was supposed to be just a little scene that I would have originally posted over on Tumblr after seeing Inpolariis beautiful art!

But the ideas simply kept coming and knowing that so many people enjoyed it, I couldn't help myself 😊

I am also quite proud of myself, because I actually finished this story! Sure, it is only three chapters, but it is one of the few multi chapter fics I have ever finished and while writing I learned a few things about my writing style, English punctuation - I am still guessing most of the time, but that is a problem I have in german as well - and the fact that I really should start writing longer chapters than 2000 - 3000 words. If only to not make people wait so often. 😊

So, all I can say is: Thank you!  
Thank you for all your support!

Who knows, maybe I see some of you in my next story! And if I don't, no worries! Your support on this one fic means more to me, than words could tell!

Have a great time, Cipher!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!